



LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

The Legislative Committee of the Washington Fire Commissioners Association held a meeting on Wednesday, August 26, 2026, via Zoom Meeting.

Present:

Chair & Region 9 Representative: Gerald Preuss - South Kitsap F&R

Region 1 Representative: Jack Hensley - Spokane 4

Region 2 Representative: Todd Blackman - Franklin 3

Region 3 Representative: Tim Freeman - Royal Slope Fire & EMS

Region 4 Representative: Jeff Myers - Kittitas 7

Region 6 Representative: Anita Sandall - King 10

Region 7 Representative: Brandon Faust - Thurston 6

Region 8 Representative: Roy Rhine - Clark 5

Absent:

Region 5 Representative: Jerry Evans - Camano Island F&R

Guests:

Chad Cross – WA State Fire Marshal's Office

Melissa Gannie – WA State Fire Marshal's Office

John Linboe – South Pierce Fire and Rescue District 17

Les Riel – WFCA President, Yakima 4

Ryan Spiller – WFCA Lobbyist

Brian Snure – Snure Law Office

WFCA Staff Present: Tori Pettis and Mary J. Drew

I. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Gerald Preuss called the Legislative Committee meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

Introductions followed.

II. Fire Marshal's Office Report

Chad Cross provided an update from the State Fire Marshal's Office. He reported that the office continues to operate under significant budget constraints, limiting its ability to pursue additional funding requests.

The committee discussed the particularly active 2026 fire season and the financial pressures on the mobilization program. Approximately \$54 million in mobilization response costs have been incurred this season, compared with a biennial appropriation of approximately \$7.5 million.

Historically, supplemental appropriations have been necessary to cover actual mobilization costs, with the previous legislative session being an exception.

Ryan Spiller noted the state's challenging budget environment and cautioned that fire service funding should not be assumed to be protected. He encouraged the fire service to treat adequate mobilization funding as a significant legislative concern and potential priority for the upcoming session.

Cross stated that the State Fire Marshal's Office intends to continue following recommendations from the Department of Commerce study identifying gaps within the fire service and to seek a larger appropriation for the mobilization program. The issue is also expected to be brought before the Fire Service Policy Board for consideration and prioritization.

Melissa Gannie explained that the reported mobilization amount does not include all associated costs, including aircraft and resources provided through interstate compacts. Certain qualifying incidents may receive reimbursement through FEMA's Fire Management Assistance Grant program; however, reimbursement and payment processes can take considerable time. The state continues to process costs associated with incidents from 2024 and 2025. She also noted that reimbursement processes differ for volunteers who become state employees during mobilization and regularly employed responders.

Cross further discussed efforts to modernize and streamline the mobilization program, including continued work related to the Mobilization Operating Guide (MOG), while acknowledging the broader state budget challenges.

III. Legislative Proposals from Brian Snure

Brian Snure reported that he had met with Executive Director Tori Pettis and Lobbyist Ryan Spiller during the summer to identify potential statutory changes affecting fire districts and regional fire authorities. He presented nine proposals for consideration, noting that most would have little or no significant state budget impact.

1. General Election Ballot Measure Filing Deadline – Revise the filing deadline for general election ballot measures when a substantially identical measure is on the primary ballot. Current deadlines can require districts to prepare and file provisional measures before primary election results are known, creating unnecessary duplication and expense. Spiller indicated he plans to bring the proposal to another legislative group to build broader support.
2. Tax Boundary Establishment Dates – Move the tax boundary establishment date for fire district mergers and city annexations into fire districts from August 1 to October 1. This would align the process more closely with regional fire authority statutes and allow qualifying changes approved at a primary election to take effect for taxation purposes within the same calendar year.

3. City Annexations into Fire Districts – Remove the requirement for separate majority approval from both city and fire district voters when a city seeks annexation into a fire district. The proposal would leave the election with city voters, with the fire district represented through its elected board of commissioners.
4. Unit Price Contracting – Authorize fire protection districts and regional fire authorities to use unit-priced, or “on-call,” public works contracts. This would provide districts, particularly those without sufficient internal staffing or capacity, with procurement authority similar to that available to other special purpose districts. Snure identified this as a high-priority proposal.
5. Sales Tax Exemption for Contractual Consolidations – Extend the existing sales and use tax exemption for transfers of property associated with contractual consolidations beyond its current December 31, 2029 expiration date.
6. Civil Service in Regional Fire Authorities – Establish a process allowing a regional fire authority to dissolve an existing civil service system when supported by both the governing board and affected employees.
7. Fire District Board Size – Allow fire district boards to increase or reduce the number of commissioners without requiring voter approval, particularly when changes are necessary following participation in a regional fire authority.
8. Fire District Dissolution Following RFA Formation – Allow a fire district board to dissolve the district without a separate election when the district is a participating jurisdiction in a regional fire authority and the continued existence of the district no longer serves a governance purpose.
9. Commissioner Vacancy Process – Streamline the process for filling commissioner vacancies in larger districts by eliminating the requirement that the board first nominate a candidate before soliciting additional nominations from the public. The proposed change would allow districts to proceed directly to public notice and solicitation of candidates, helping districts complete the appointment process within the required 60-day timeframe.

The committee discussed the proposals as potential components of the Association’s legislative work for the 2027 session.

IV. Proposed Issues for 2027 Legislative Session

A. OIC – Wildfire Mitigation Grant Program

Spiller provided an update on wildfire mitigation legislation considered during the previous legislative session. The proposal would establish grants to help property owners make improvements intended to reduce wildfire risk. The legislation did not advance last session, in part due to communication and coordination issues among affected stakeholders.

Spiller reported that he has been working to bring interested parties together during the interim to address concerns and improve the proposal's chances of moving forward during the 2027 session.

B. OIC – Wildfire Risk Scores & Transparency

Spiller also discussed legislation intended to provide greater transparency when insurers cancel or decline to renew property insurance based on wildfire risk. The proposal would require insurers to provide property owners with information regarding the reasons for the decision and the risk factors involved.

The committee discussed the need for property owners to understand what mitigation measures could potentially address identified risks, as well as the broader need for improved wildfire risk mapping.

In response to a question regarding funding, Spiller explained that the related mitigation grant proposal would use funds set aside and administered through the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

Roy Myers suggested gathering information regarding uninsured wildfire losses and the number of insurance cancellations or nonrenewals since the legislation failed to advance last year to better demonstrate the scope of the issue.

Chair Preuss asked whether wildfire mitigation and insurance transparency should remain among the committee's legislative priorities. Committee members agreed unanimously that the issues should remain a priority.

C. Timber Tax Impact on Fire Districts

Spiller reported on continuing discussions regarding declining timber revenues and the resulting impact on fire districts and other local governments that rely on those revenues. A broader group of affected timber districts and local governments has been assembled, and discussions are underway with the Commissioner of Public Lands.

Spiller noted that it is not yet clear whether legislation will be introduced during the 2027 session, but the issue remains active. Reductions in timber sales continue to create financial challenges for affected fire districts.

D. Other

The committee discussed the financial impact of Washington's Paid Family and Medical Leave program on fire districts. Because many districts do not have sufficient staffing to absorb extended absences, leave can result in significant overtime expenses to maintain minimum staffing levels.

Members expressed concern that state-level policy requirements can create substantial costs for local governments. The committee acknowledged the issue as significant but noted that a specific legislative solution has not yet been identified.

V. Membership Survey Results

Executive Director Tori Pettis reviewed results from the recent WFCOA legislative issues survey. Responses largely reinforced concerns previously raised by members, including:

- The 101% property tax levy limitation;
- Wildland fire and mobilization funding;
- Property insurance and wildfire risk;
- Unfunded mandates;
- Sales tax on fire district purchases; and
- Declining timber revenue.

Spiller stated that each of the issues identified through the survey is part of WFCOA's broader legislative work. While not every issue is expected to result in legislation during the upcoming session, WFCOA will continue looking for opportunities to advance the issues through legislation, education, stakeholder outreach, and communication.

Myers asked what potentially adverse legislation the fire service should be watching for during the upcoming session. Spiller noted the possibility that previously defeated legislation could return and said protecting existing fire service funding and programs will be particularly important given the state budget environment. He specifically identified the possibility of reduced reimbursement for mobilization-related costs as an area of concern.

VI. Comments for the Good of the Order

Chair Preuss expressed interest in inviting representatives from the State Fire Marshal's Office to return for an update closer to the beginning of the legislative session, potentially at a December meeting.

VII. Next Meeting

The next Legislative Committee meeting is scheduled for September 25, 2026, at 11:00 a.m.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, Chair Preuss adjourned the meeting at 12:41 p.m.